

Geography and History Activity

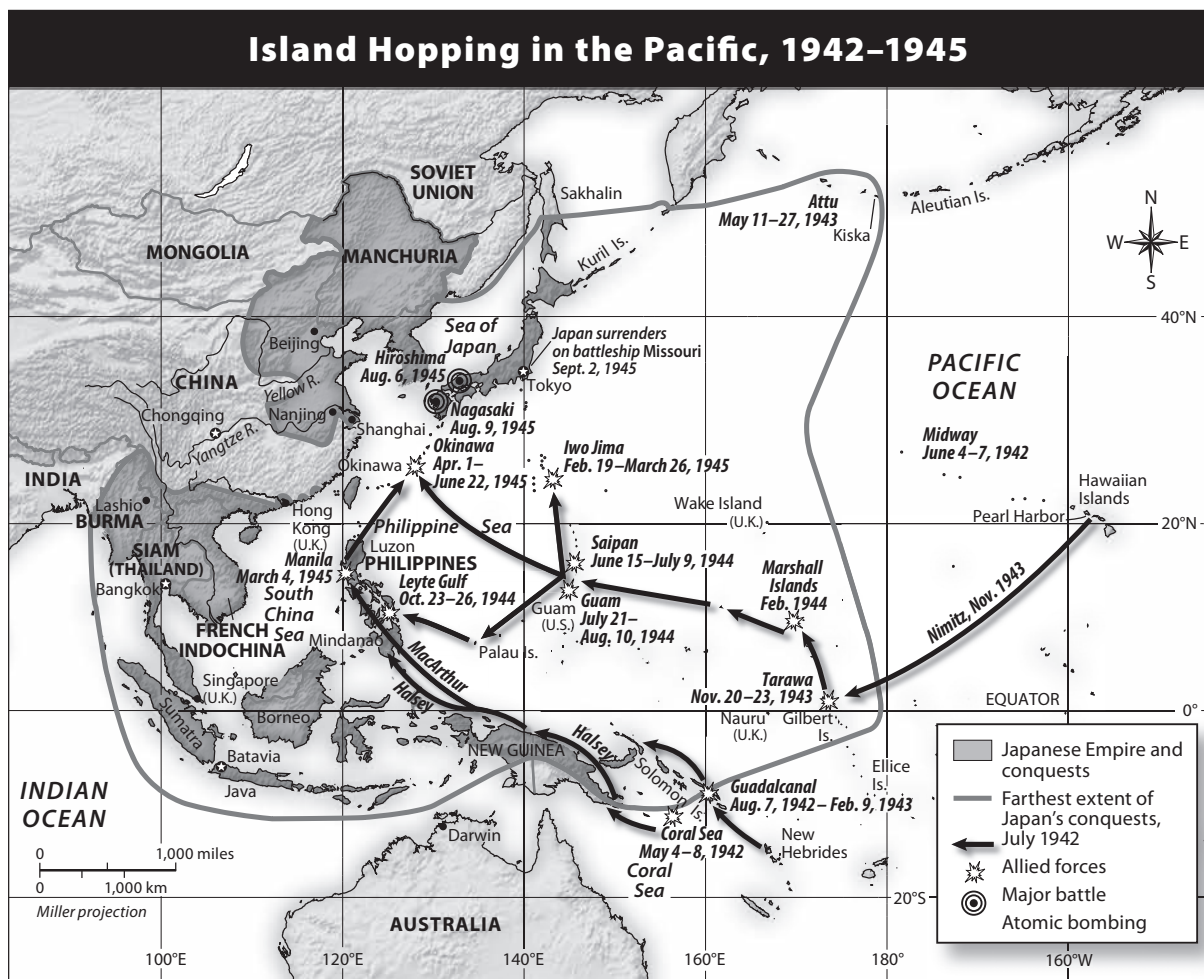
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America and World War II, 1941–1945

Island Hopping

Advancing on Japan

The war in the Pacific involved a major geographic obstacle: the Pacific Ocean. In order to attack Japan, U.S. forces would have to advance across thousands of miles of ocean and attack heavily fortified Japanese positions on small, strategically important islands. The U.S. strategy involved a two-pronged advance. The U.S. navy would island hop through the central Pacific while the Army advanced through the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, and the Philippines. Tarawa was the U.S. navy's first objective. The Japanese base there had to be captured in order to put air bases in the nearby Marshall Islands. After the Marshall Islands, the U.S. navy targeted the Mariana Islands. The U.S. military planners wanted to use the Marianas as a base for a new heavy bomber, the B-29 Superfortress. From airfields in the Marianas, the B-29s would be in range of the Japanese mainland and could begin a bombing campaign intended to end the war.



Caption: This map shows the naval and army advances across the Pacific from 1942–1945.

United States History and Geography: Modern Times

Geography and History Activity *Cont.*

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America and World War II, 1941–1945

The Difficulties of Island Hopping

By the fall of 1943, the U.S. navy was ready to launch its island-hopping campaign, but the geography of the central Pacific posed a problem. Many of the islands were coral reef atolls. The water over the coral reef was not always deep enough to allow landing craft to get to the shore. If the landing craft ran aground on the reef, the troops would have to wade to the beach. Wading ashore under enemy fire led to very high casualty rates among U.S. troops.

Directions: Answer the questions below in the space provided.

Understanding Concepts

1. What geographic challenge led to the use of island hopping?

2. What were some of the dangers posed by the island hopping strategy?

3. What did the United States gain by capturing the Mariana Islands?

Applying Concepts

4. How do you think U.S. bombing of the Japanese mainland contributed to the end of the war in the Pacific?

5. Do you think the United States was justified in the use of atomic weapons in the Pacific? Why or why not?

